

Kalmyk Oirat

Kalmyk Oirat (Kalmyk: Хальмг Өөрдін келн, *Hal'mg Öördin keln*, IPA: [xalˠ ˈməɡ oːrˠ tɨn kɛˠ lən]),^[3] commonly known as the **Kalmyk language** (Kalmyk: Хальмг келн, *Hal'mg keln*, IPA: [xalˠ ˈməɡ kɛˠ lɛn]), is a register of the Oirat language, natively spoken by the Kalmyk people of Kalmykia, a federal subject of Russia. In Russia, it is the standard form of the Oirat language (based on the Torgut dialect), which belongs to the Mongolic language family. The Kalmyk people of the Northwest Caspian Sea of Russia claim descent from the Oirats from Eurasia, who have also historically settled in Mongolia and Northwest China. According to UNESCO, the language is "Definitely endangered".^[4] According to the Russian census of 2010, there are 80,500 speakers of an ethnic population consisting of 183,000 people.^[5]

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History

Kalmyk is now only spoken as a native language by a small minority of the Kalmyk population. Its decline as a living language began after the Kalmyk people were deported en masse from their homeland in December 1943, as punishment for limited Kalmyk collaboration with the Nazis. Significant factors contributing to its demise include: (1) the deaths of a substantial percentage of the Kalmyk population from disease and malnutrition, both during their travel and upon their arrival to remote

Kalmyk	
Хальмг келн , <i>Hal'mg keln</i>	
Native to	Russia
Region	Kalmykia
Ethnicity	Kalmyk
<div>Native speakers</div>	80,500 (2010) ^[1]
<div>Language family</div>	<div>Mongolic<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Mongolic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Oirat<ul style="list-style-type: none">Torgut and Dorbet<ul style="list-style-type: none">Kalmyk</div>
<div>Writing system</div>	Cyrillic, Latin, Clear script
Official status	
<div>Official language in</div>	<div> Russia<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kalmykia</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-2	xal (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=491)
ISO 639-3	xal
Linguist List	xal-kal (http://multitree.org/codes/xal-kal)
Glottolog	kalm1243 (http://glottolog.org/resource/linguoid/id/kalm1243) ^[2]

exile settlements in Central Asia, south central Siberia and the Soviet Far East; (2) the wide dispersal of the Kalmyk population; (3) the duration of exile, which ended in 1957; (4) the stigma associated with being accused of treason, and (5) assimilation into the larger, more dominant culture. Collectively, these factors discontinued the intergenerational language transmission.

In 1957, the Soviet government reinstated the Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast and later reestablished the Autonomous Republic of Kalmykia. The Kalmyk people were permitted to return to the Republic in 1957, 14 years after exile. The Russian language, however, was made the official language of the Republic, and Sovietisation was imposed on the Kalmyk people, leading to drastic cuts in Kalmyk language education. The Cyrillic alphabet became firmly established among the Kalmyks (and other peoples, too). For instance, books, periodicals, newspapers, etc., were published using it. By the late 1970s, the Russian language became the primary language of instruction in all schools in the Republic.

During the period of Perestroika, Kalmyk linguists, in collaboration with the Kalmyk government, planned and tried to implement the revival of the Kalmyk language. This revival was seen as an integral part of the reassertion of Kalmyk culture. In an important symbolic gesture, the Kalmyk language was declared an official language of the Republic, giving it equal status with the Russian language with respect to official governmental use and language education.

During the production of the film *Return of the Jedi*, sound designer Rafe Mercieca—with his life-time partner Ben Curtis—based the language of the Ewoks on Kalmyk after hearing it spoken in a documentary and being impressed with its unusual phonology.

Geographic distribution

The majority of Kalmyk language speakers live in the Republic of Kalmykia, where it is an official language. A small group of Kalmyk language speakers also live in France and the USA, but the use of Kalmyk is in steep decline. In all three locations, the actual number of speakers is unknown. Kalmyk is regarded as an endangered language.

As of 2012, the Kalmyk community in New Jersey, which arrived in the US in the 1950s, was planning to work with the Endangered Voices project to promote Kalmyk language and culture.^[6]

Linguistic classification

From a synchronic perspective, Kalmyk is the most prominent variety of Oirat. It is very close to the Oirat dialects found in Mongolia and the People's Republic of China, both phonologically and morphologically. The differences in dialects, however, concern the vocabulary, as the Kalmyk language has been influenced by and has adopted words from the Russian language and various Turkic languages.

Two important features that characterise Kalmyk are agglutination and vowel harmony. In an agglutinative language, words are formed by adding suffixes to existing words, called stem words or root words. Prefixes, however, are not common in Mongolic. Vowel harmony refers to the agreement between the vowels in the root of a word and the vowels in the word's suffix or suffixes. Other features include the absence of grammatical gender (with its distinctions of masculine, feminine, and neuter).

It has some elements in common with the Uralic and Uyghur languages, which reflects its origin from the common language of the Oirats, a union of four Oirat tribes that absorbed some Ugric and Turkic tribes during their expansion westward.

Writing systems

The literary tradition of Oirat reaches back to 11th century when the Old Uyghur script was used. The official Kalmyk alphabet, named Clear Script or *Todo bichig* in Oirat, was created in the 17th century by a Kalmyk Buddhist monk called Zaya Pandita.

Like the Old Mongolian script, Todo bichig was written from top to bottom. Written Oirat language contained many words borrowed from the Mongolian language and not used in everyday speech, despite many attempts to bring the written standard and colloquial spoken language closer together. Thus, already at the beginning of the 18th century, two written forms of the Kalmyk language were recorded - “bookish”, used in religious practice and having numerous Mongolian and Tibetan borrowings and preserving archaic language forms, as well as “conversational”, used in private correspondence and reflecting the changes taking place in the language^[7],^[8]

Todo bichig, also called “zayapandit script” after its creator, existed among the Kalmyks until 1924 with minor changes. Oirats of China use it to the present.^[9]

In 1924 this script was replaced by an adaptation of the Cyrillic script, which was abandoned in 1930 in favour of a Latin script.

Short Vowels				Consonants			
Initial	Medial	Final	Latin	Initial	Medial	Final	Latin
ᠠ	ᠡ	ᠢ	a	ᠪ	ᠪ	ᠪ	b
ᠡ	ᠢ	ᠣ	e	ᠮ	ᠮ	ᠮ	m
ᠢ	ᠣ	ᠤ	i	ᠨ	ᠨ	ᠨ	n
ᠣ	ᠤ	ᠥ	o	ᠬ	ᠬ	ᠬ	kh
ᠤ	ᠥ	ᠦ	u	ᠳ	ᠳ	ᠳ	d
				ᠰ	ᠰ	ᠰ	s
				ᠴ	ᠴ	ᠴ	ch
				ᠱ	ᠱ	ᠱ	sh
				ᠭ	ᠭ	ᠭ	g
				ᠬ	ᠬ	ᠬ	kh
				ᠳ	ᠳ	ᠳ	d
				ᠰ	ᠰ	ᠰ	s
				ᠴ	ᠴ	ᠴ	ch
				ᠱ	ᠱ	ᠱ	sh
				ᠭ	ᠭ	ᠭ	g

Long Vowels

Initial	Medial	Final	Latin
ᠠᠠ	ᠡᠡ	ᠢᠢ	aa
ᠣᠣ	ᠤᠤ	ᠥᠥ	oo
ᠦᠦ	ᠦᠦ	ᠦᠦ	yy
ᠥᠥ	ᠥᠥ	ᠥᠥ	öö
ᠦᠦ	ᠦᠦ	ᠦᠦ	üü

Alphabets based on Cyrillic (the end of XIX - beginning of XX century)

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Orthodox Missionary Society published a number of school books in the Kalmyk language, using Cyrillic script. The first edition of this kind was the "Primer for Kalmyk ulus schools" (1892). The alphabet used in this primer has the following composition: **А а, Б б, В в, Г г, Д д, Е е, З з, И и, К к, Л л, М м, Н н, О о, П п, Р р, С с, Т т, У у, Х х, Ц ц, Ч ч, Ш ш, Ъ ъ, Э э, Ю ю, Я я, Ä ä, Ä ä, Ä ä, Ö ö, Ö ö, Ö ö, Ü ü, Ü ü, Ü ü, Дж дж, Нг нг, Йй, йй, Йе йе, Йё йё, Äй äй, Йй, Э э, Ю ю, Я я.**^[10] In 1902, the “Primer for Kalmyks” was released, where a different version of the alphabet was used: **А а, Б б, Г г, Д д, З з, И и, Йй, К к, Л л, М м, Н н, О о, Р р, С с, Т т, У у, Х х, Ц ц, Ч ч, Ш ш, Ъ ъ, Э э, Ä ä, Ä ä, Ä ä, Ö ö, Ö ö, Ö ö, Ü ü, Ü ü, Ü ü, Дж дж, Н н, Йй, Э э.**^[11] At the same time, the letter of the clear script continued to be used.^[12]

On January 6, 1924, a meeting of the Kalmyk public was held in Astrakhan. At this meeting, the majority of the votes had declared obsolete writing - it was noted that it was difficult for writing and learning, lack of fonts, the inability to use on the telegraph, and so on. In this regard, it was decided to translate Kalmyk language into Cyrillic script. On January 12, the alphabet was adopted, consisting of the following letters: **А а, Б б, В в, Г г, Д д, Е е, Ж ж, З з, И и, К к, Л л, М м, Н н, О о, П п, Р р, С с, Т т, У у, Ф ф, Х х, Ц ц, Ч ч, Ш ш, Щ щ, Ы ы, Э э, Ю ю, Я я, Ъ ъ, Йй, ä, ö, ü, Ң, Җ.** Above the long vowels was supposed to put a line (macron), but in practice this was not done. Also, despite the absence of an approved project, the letter **ъ** was used to designate unclear vowels. From January 1926, the newspaper «**Ulan Halmg**» (ru) began to be printed on this alphabet^[7]. The basis of the emerging Kalmyk literary language was the Torgut dialect, but later the norm began to focus not only on the Torgut, but also on the Derbet dialect.^[13] Sometimes in the editions of that time, the letter **Ң** was replaced by **Н** or **Һ**, and the letters **Е е, Ж ж, Ф ф, Щ щ** were not officially included in the alphabet.^[14]

September 7, 1926 at a meeting at the Kalmyk pedagogical school in Astrakhan, it was decided to make changes to the alphabet. So, all additional letters were canceled, and instead of them entered **Д д, В в, Н н.** In June 1927, this alphabet was introduced into official use, but much of the literature and press was still published in the alphabet of 1924^[7].

On February 5-8, 1928, a regular meeting on Kalmyk writing was held, at which the alphabet was reformed again. The letters *D d*, *V v*, *H h* were canceled, and the letter **Ə ə** was entered to indicate unclear vowels. It was decided to denote the long vowels by doubling the corresponding letters. This alphabet was used until 1930^[7].

Latin alphabet

In the late 1920s, the process of romanization of writing began in the USSR. In the course of this process in January 1930, the IX Kalmyk Regional Congress of Soviets legalized the new Latinized alphabet of the Kalmyk language. Its actual use began in newspapers from the end of September of the same year^[7]. In this alphabet, the letters were arranged in the following order^[7]: **A a, B b, C c, Ç ç, D d, E e, Ə ə, G g, H h, I i, j, K k, L l, M m, N n, Ƣ ƣ, O o, Ө ө, P p, R r, S s, Ş ş, F f, Y y, Z z, Ž ž, U u, T t, V v, X x, Ь**.

On January 10-17, 1931, at a conference held in Moscow, scientists of the Mongolian group of peoples decided to change the phonetic meaning of the two letters of the Kalmyk script, as well as change the alphabetical order of the letters. In May of the same year, the III Kalmyk Regional Conference on Language and Writing, which was held in Elista, confirmed this decision. The alphabet took the following form^[7]:

A a	B b	C c	Ç ç	D d	E e	Ə ə
F f	G g	H h	I i	J j	K k	L l
M m	N n	Ƣ ƣ	O o	Ө ө	P p	R r
S s	Ş ş	T t	U u	V v	X x	Y y
Z z	Ž ž	Ь ь				

The letter *Ь ь*, unlike most other Soviet Latinized alphabets, denoted palatalization.^[15] In this form, the alphabet existed until 1938.

Modern Cyrillic alphabet

In the second half of the 1930s, the USSR began the process of translating scripts into Cyrillic. The Latin script was in turn replaced by another Cyrillic script in 1938. Initially, the Kalmyk Cyrillic alphabet included all the letters of the Russian alphabet, as well as **Ӑ ӑ, Гъ гъ, Дж дж, Нъ нъ, Ӗ ӗ, Ӛ ӛ**. In 1941, the alphabet was reformed again - the outline of additional letters was changed.^[7] However, due to the deportation of the Kalmyks that followed soon, the transition to a new version of the alphabet was carried out only after their rehabilitation - in the late 1950s.^[16] These script reforms effectively disrupted the Oirat literary tradition.^[17]

The modern Cyrillic alphabet used for the Kalmyk language is as follows:

А а	Ә ә	Б б	В в	Г г	Һ һ	Д д
Е е	Ё ё	Ж ж	Ӣ ӣ	З з	И и	Й й
К к	Л л	М м	Н н	Ӧ ӧ	О о	Ө ө
П п	Р р	С с	Т т	У у	Ү ү	Ф ф
Х х	Ц ц	Ч ч	Ш ш	Щ щ	Ъ ъ	Ы ы

Ь ь	Э э	Ю ю	Я я
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Alphabet matching table

Modern cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic 1920-30s	Clear script	IPA	Transliteration ^[18]
А а	A a	А а	Ა	a	A a
Ә ә	Ә ә	Ä ä (1938-41) Я я (1928-30) ä (1926-28) Ä ä (1924-26)	-	ə	Ä ä
Б б	B b	Б б	Ბ	p, p ^j	B b
В в	V v	В в	Გ	w, w ^j	V v
Г г	G g	Г г	Დ	g, g ^j , ɢ	G g
Һ һ	H h	Гъ гъ (1938-41) Г г (1928-30) h h (1926-28) Г г (1924-26)	Ე	ɣ	ḥ
Д д	D d	Д д	Ვ	t, t ^j	D d
Е е	E e	Е е	-	je	Ye ye
Ё ё (in Russian loanwords only)	-	-	-	jɔ	Yo yo
Ж ж	Z z	Ж ж	-	ʈʂ	Zh zh (Ž ž)
Ж ж	ž ž	Дж дж (1938-41) Ж ж (1928-30) Дж дж (1926-28) Џ џ (1924-26)	Ზ	ɟʂ	ž
З з	Z z	З з	Თ	ʈ	Z z
И и	I i	И и	Ი	i	I i
Й й	J j	Й й	Კ	j	Y y
К к	K k	К к	Ლ, ʁ	(k), (k ^j)	K k
Л л	L l	Л л	Მ	ʎ, ʎ ^j	L l
М м	M m	М м	Ნ	m, m ^j	M m
Н н	N n	Н н	Ო	n, n ^j	N n
Ң ң	Ŋ ŋ	Нъ нъ (1938-41) Нг нг (1926-30) Ң ң (1924-26)	Პ	ŋ	Ñ ñ
О о	O o	О о	Ჟ	ɔ	O o
Ө ө	Ө ө	Ö ö (1938-41) Э э (1928-30) v (1926-28) Ö ö (1924-26)	Რ	o	Ö ö
П п	P p	П п	Ს	(p ^h), (p ^h j)	P p
Р р	R r	Р р	Ტ	r, r ^j	R r
С с	S s	С с	Უ	s	S s
Т т	T t	Т т	Ფ	t ^h , t ^h j	T t
У у	U u	У у	Ქ	ʊ	U u

Ү ү	У у	ӱ ӱ (1938-41) Ю ю (1926-30) ӱ ӱ (1924-26)	ᠦ	u	ù
Ф ф (in Russian loanwords only)	F f	Ф ф	-	(f)	F f
Х х	Х х	Х х	ᠬ	x, xʲ	H h
Ц ц	С с (1931-38) Ç ç (1930-31)	Ц ц	ᠴ	t͡ɕʰ	C c
Ч ч	Ç ç (1931-38) C c (1930-31)	Ч ч	ᠴ	t͡ɕʰ	Ch ch (ç)
Ш ш	Ş ş	Ш ш	ᠱ	ʃ	Sh sh (ş)
Щ щ (in Russian loanwords only)	-	Щ щ	-	(st͡ɕ)	şç
Ъ ъ (in Russian loanwords only)	-	-	-	-	-
Ы ы (in Russian loanwords only)	-	Ы ы	-	i	Y y
Ь ь (in Russian loanwords only)	Ь ь	Ь ь	-	j	'
Э э	E e	Э э	ᠡ	e	E e
Ю ю	-	Ю ю	-	jʊ	Yu yu
Я я	-	Я я	-	ja	Ya ya

Phonology

Consonants

Consonants of Kalmyk

		Labial	Alveolar	Post alveolar	Velar
Plosive	voiceless	p	t	t͡ɕ	k
	voiced	b	d	d͡ɕ	g
Affricate	voiceless		t͡s	t͡ɕ	
	voiced			d͡ʒ	
Fricative	voiceless		s	ʃ	x
	voiced		z		ɣ
Nasal		m	n	ɳ	ŋ
Trill			r		
Approximant	lateral		l	ɭ	
	central	w		j	

Vowels

Vowels^[19]

	Front		Back
Close	i	y	u
Mid	e	ø	o
Open	æ		a

The open back vowel is phonetically central [ä].

See also


- Languages of the Caucasus

Notes

1. Kalmyk in Ethnologue (<http://www.ethnologue.com/language/xal>)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Oirad-Kalmyk-Darkhat" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kalm1243>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Kalmyk is alternatively spelled as Kalmuck, Qalmaq, or Khal:mag; Kalmyk Oirat is sometimes called "Russian Oirat" or "Western Mongol"
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15. "По поводу проекта латинизации калмыцкого алфавита" (<http://dlib.rsl.ru/viewer/01005509739#?page=200>). *Новый член алфавитной унии. Культура и письменность Востока. VI*. Баку. 1930. pp. 200–201.
16. Р. С. Гиляревский, В. С. Гривин (1961). *Определитель языков мира по письменностям* (2-е ed.). М.: Изд-во восточной литературы. p. 64.
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19. Ko, Seongyeon (2011). *Vowel Contrast and Vowel Harmony Shift in the Mongolic Languages*.

External links

-  [Kalmyk phrasebook](#) travel guide from Wikivoyage
 - [\khamagmongol.com/tuuli/tales - Kalmyk fairy tales in Kalmyk and Russian languages]
 - [Article on language policy and history in Kalmykia](https://web.archive.org/web/20041224191946/http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm01hivern-primavera/internacional/kornou1_9.htm) (https://web.archive.org/web/20041224191946/http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm01hivern-primavera/internacional/kornou1_9.htm)
 - [Russian-Kalmyk On-Line Dictionary](http://словарь.хальмгтангч.рф) (<http://словарь.хальмгтангч.рф>)
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